

VZCZCXRO2843
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHKU #4637/01 3461343
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 121343Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7868
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 004637

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FOR S/CT, NEA/ARP, EB/ESC/TFS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/11/2011

TAGS: PTER KTFN PREL

SUBJECT: TERROR FINANCE: KUWAITI REACTION TO U.S.
DESIGNATION OF TERRORIST FACILITATORS

REF: A. STATE 192459

1B. KUWAIT 4625

1C. KUWAIT 4623

1D. KUWAIT 4617

Classified By: DCM Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C/NF) Summary: Response in Kuwait to the USG domestic designation on December 7 of three Kuwaitis -- Hamed Al-Ali, Jaber Al-Jalahmah, and Mubarak Al-Bathali -- as terrorist facilitators and inciters (Ref A) has been muted. There has been little commentary on the development in the Kuwaiti press, and no official reaction from the GOK. The subject did not arise during NEA PDAS Jeffrey's press roundtable on December 9 (Ref B), and Kuwaiti contacts have generally not raised the issue during meetings this week with the Ambassador and emboffs. When the topic has arisen, the reaction has been mixed, with one government official in favor and one MP opposed. The exception has been a loud and defiant reaction from the designees themselves. With many local issues dominating the press, such as consumer loans, the travails of the stock market, and parliamentary wrangling, the designations appear to have passed under the radar of most Kuwaitis, who likely support the U.S. designation of terrorists (or are at least inured to it), especially in their midst, even if the publicity rankles.
End Summary.

Kuwaitis Muted

12. (C/NF) The Treasury Department's December 7 designation of five terrorist facilitators, three of whom are Kuwaiti, has provoked little reaction thus far in Kuwait. Kuwaiti interlocutors in a series of previously scheduled meetings with the Ambassador and emboffs generally did not raise or comment on the issue. A high-level official in the Ministry of Finance appeared to support the designations, describing two of the three designees as "well-known radicals" (he had not heard of the third individual). In a December 11 meeting with the Ambassador (Ref C), Islamist MP and Chairman of the Parliamentary Financial and Economic Affairs Committee Ahmad Baeqer explained efforts by his (Salafi) group to root out supporters of terror, and said there is a difference between peaceful fundamentalists and "those who cross the line." Some Kuwaitis, he said, talk about supporting terrorism but do not actually take steps to do so. The Ambassador responded that advocating terrorism constitutes support, and that the U.S. will continue to pursue terrorist supporters. The Ambassador also took the occasion to note that the USG's primary concern with some Kuwaiti charities is not the way they collect funds in Kuwait, but the lack of control and oversight over how funds are used in other countries.

Designees Defiant

¶13. (U) In contrast to the subdued reaction in most quarters, the designees themselves seized the airwaves to proclaim their defiance. In the English-language Arab Times on December 10, Hamad Al-Ali described the designation as only part of a long U.S. list of accusations against Muslim personalities, charity societies, preachers, and scholars who reject U.S. designs for the region. He added, "We are going to take necessary measures against this false accusation by filing cases against those who have issued these decisions." Attorney Mubarak Al-Mutawa, who has represented Al-Ali earlier in cases filed against him in the Kuwaiti courts reportedly said, "Shaykh Hamed was acquitted by both the Court of First Instance and the Appeals Court, which means there is nothing wrong against the man." Al-Mutawa stated that Al-Ali has neither business ventures nor money in the U.S., so he has nothing to fear from a decision taken by the U.S. Treasury Department.

¶14. (U) Al-Jalahmah reportedly vowed to the Arab Times on December 10 that he will file a lawsuit against the Secretary of the Treasury. He added that it is not unusual for the U.S. authorities to deliberately damage the image of Islamists.

¶15. (U) In the same article, Al-Bathali said he was not upset by the decision, but rather considers it an honor to be among those who serve Muslims all over the world. He added that the turbulent situations in Iraq, Afghanistan and other Muslim countries are a direct result of U.S. interference in the internal affairs of these countries. He said, "The U.S. will not be able to continue its policy of divide and rule.

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We will keep supporting Muslims wherever and whenever the need arises."

Limited Expressions of Support for the Designees

¶16. (U) There was no mention of the designations in the Op-Ed pages of Kuwait dailies except for a few comments from supporters of the designees. On December 11, in the progressive Arabic daily Al-Qabas, liberal commentator Imad Al-Saif said, "I concur with what the Kuwaiti citizen Jaber Al-Jalahmah said about his intentions to file a law suit against the U.S. Secretary of Treasury. Facing such claims in Washington itself in such a respectable and civilized manner may slightly improve the image of the Arabs and Muslims in the world." On December 10, in the Arabic daily Al-Watan, commentator Nabil Al-Fudhil said, "Al-Bathali is committed and proud of what he is doing. We respect his frankness although we disagree with his thoughts and logic."

¶17. (U) On December 10 in the pro-government Arabic daily Al-Seyassah, commentator Mohammed Yousef Al-Mulaifi said, "The U.S. decided to freeze their assets and pick their pockets just because of their sympathy! In short, the U.S. Treasury decision is a message to Kuwaitis and Arabs that once they sense your sympathy for Jihad they will freeze your assets and confiscate your money. Noble people, your donations should go to Jihad, not only to starving people. The Prophet Mohammed never established a charity. Those who think about starving people day and night and deny Jihad may believe that they satisfy God. In fact, they are dissatisfying God and satisfying America."

Comment

¶18. (C/NF) These designations seem to be crowded out of the local press by stories that have a more direct impact on Kuwaitis' daily lives. An especially volatile period for the Kuwaiti stock market, a heated Parliamentary debate over

forgiveness of consumer loans, and charges of rampant corruption in government contracting have been the dominant news items over the last week. Most Kuwaitis oppose extremism, especially in their midst, but likely find the negative publicity from U.S. designations embarrassing.

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